

Venerable Piyadassi Nayaka Thera - An Appreciation

Bhikkhu Dhammavihari

Auckland, New Zealand

I was deeply saddened to hear of the passing away of the most venerable Piyadassi Nayaka Thera through a mail received a little while ago from a good dayaka of mine in Sri Lanka. Both the Nayaka Thera and I knew that it was to happen sooner than later. During the first week in July, I went to see the Nayaka Thera at the Cardiology Unit in Colombo to see him and wish him well before my departure to New Zealand to undertake my Rains Retreat here. He lay flat in the bed, looking completely helpless. I was immediately reminded of the *Dhamma pāṭha* which runs as *hatthapādā anassavā yassa so vihatatthāmo*: lacking completely in strength and with no command over one's limbs.

I sized up the situation immediately and I believe so had the Thera done it himself. After I paid my respectful veneration to the Nayaka Thera and informed him of my intended departure out of the country for a limited period of time, he took my hand firmly and pressed it very paternally and said this to me in great earnest. 'I am not any more capable of doing what I have done so far. It is for people like you to continue this great mission which the world very badly needs today.'

I felt deeply moved and stirred within. For more than fifty years I have known the Nayaka Thera. I was then a young university student of about twenty years and he was about seven years my senior. In our very early encounters he proved to us what he was going to be in later years - a prolific writer and a profound preacher of the Buddha dhamma. My beloved friend, late Professor K.N. Jayatilleka who has now being dead for twenty-eight years and I both soon discovered that here was the pole star in the sky, not to be missed. We did regularly invite him to the university circles, for sermons, discussions and to

participate in Buddhist study groups.

Coming from the then rightly famous Vajirarama group, ably led and guided by the renowned Pelene Vajiranana Maha Nayaka Thera, young Bhikkhu Piyadassi, as he announced himself then, always came out in flying colours, even out of meetings which at times turned out to be a bit stormy. With a promising great stature and a tremendous amount of self-confidence, we saw him over the years growing to be the Wandering Monk, as his biography by that name later portrays him. He was a tower of strength to many.

To us he has been a wonderful guide in many ways. Quite apart from getting anywhere near where he did, it is a source of great inspiration for us to emulate. We were mutually interacting on each other. He would freely quote from our writings and openly admit his borrowings. Such was his intellectual honesty. Admirable indeed.

Venerable Sir, we can sing a great deal more in praise of you. Such was our close association. When I sadly said good bye to you in July, I was quite sure I would not see you alive again. So now let me pay you my last respectful *namaskāra*, promising to follow in the trail you so successfully blazed. I wish that your sojourn in *samsāra* be short and sweet and may you get well ahead of us in your reach for *nibbāna*.